

San Jacinto River Waste Pits, Texas

Site Update – March 2012

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

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BACKGROUND:

The site consists of impoundments located adjacent to the Interstate Highway 10 (I-10) Bridge and the San Jacinto River and the surrounding areas, containing paper mill waste from the Pasadena Champion Paper Mill. Two impoundments are located north of the I-10 Bridge and are partially submerged in the San Jacinto River on the western side in Harris County, Texas. An additional impoundment is suspected to be located directly south of the I-10 Bridge and is currently being investigated under the Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study.

The primary hazardous substances documented at the site are dioxins (polychlorinated dibenzo-p-dioxins and polychlorinated dibenzofurans). Dioxin concentrations as high as 360,000 parts per trillion have been found in sediment samples collected from the submerged portion of the waste disposal ponds, as well as dioxin concentrations as high as 3,660 parts per trillion in sediment samples collected outside the original 1966 waste ponds. A fish consumption advisory based on dioxin is in place on this segment of the watershed.

The site was listed on the EPA National Priorities List on March 19, 2008. The EPA SJRWP website can be found online at: http://www.epa.gov/region6/6sf/texas/san_jacinto.

STATUS OF CURRENT ACTIVITIES:

I. Community Outreach

EPA, in collaboration with Harris County and the State of Texas, will conduct a Community Awareness Committee meeting on April 4, 2012, to provide a site status report and plan for community engagement. EPA will also participate in the Houston- Galveston Area Council watershed meeting the same date to provide a site update.

II. Source Stabilization

On Friday, February 10, 2012, EPA conducted an onsite inspection, the first since the removal action was completed in July 2011. The inspection consisted of reviewing the site security fencing, integrity of the armor cap, and site signage. Along with visual observations, the responsible parties have also conducted hydrographic and topographic surveys on top of the cap to ensure a minimum design thickness. The hydrographic modeling results were submitted to the EPA for review on February 21, 2012, and are currently under review by the EPA site team. EPA is reviewing the revised Draft Final Construction Completion Report and plans to finalize it in April.

III. Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study (RI/FS)

Reviews by the participating agencies (EPA, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Harris County, Port of Houston Authority and the Trustees) are in progress for a number of reports, including the draft Fate and Transport Model Study Report, the draft Remedial Alternatives Memorandum, the draft Exposure Assessment Memorandum, the draft Baseline Ecological Risk Assessment, and the draft Toxicological and Epidemiological Studies Memorandum. Reviews of the sampling plan for the River Fleet property located northwest of the waste pits and regulatory reviews are continuing. Detailed plans for the proposed cap monitoring approach are being prepared now by the Potentially Responsible Parties and are expected to be submitted by the end of April 2012. Sampling of soil, sediment, and ground water at the Southern Impoundment is scheduled to begin in April 2012.

IV. Watershed Management

EPA continues to coordinate with the Port of Houston Authority, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Galveston District and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). TCEQ envisions completing the total maximum daily load for Buffalo Bayou with regard to dioxin/furan by the end of 2012 and will put together a monitoring and implementation plan to reduce levels in Buffalo Bayou to within national background levels.

V. Enforcement

The potentially responsible party group continues to conduct the RI/FS under the Unilateral Administrative Order. Respondents continue to work towards resolving the outstanding issue of stipulated penalties resulting from prior noncompliance with the order.